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New York

President:	Mr. Liu Zhenmin	(China)
Members:	Austria	Ms. Juen
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ms. Marinčić
	Brazil	Mr. Moretti
	France	Mr. Kassianides
	Gabon	Mr. Onanga Ndiaye
	Japan	Mr. Arima
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Mexico	Mr. Puente
	Nigeria	Mr. Adamu
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Turkey	Mr. Dizdar
	Uganda	Mr. Kamahungye
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Afshar
	United States of America	Ms. Schedlbauer

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes, in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Oman.

Mr. Al-Hinai (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Arab States in my capacity as its Chair for the month of January.

In its various dimensions, the situation throughout the occupied Palestinian territories is extremely serious. That is due to illegal Israeli practices, in particular in the Gaza Strip, which has been besieged in an illegal and inhuman manner for more than two years. As a result, the economy has been paralysed and there has been a dramatic impact on the health and the social and daily lives of more than 1.7 million civilians, whose lives are literally falling apart. We continue to receive reports of the situation in Gaza, the most recent of which came from the World Health Organization. All of them refer to the gravity of the situation, which poses a threat to both the life and health of innocent civilians in the Gaza Strip because of Israel's ongoing siege.

A year has elapsed since the barbaric and brutal military attack led by the Israeli occupying force in Gaza, which resulted in wide-scale destruction. The attack killed or injured thousands of Palestinians, including hundreds of women and children. That barbaric Israeli aggression served to increase the suffering of civilians, the impact of which we continue to see today in destroyed property and loss of Palestinian lives. The occupying Power is also preventing all attempts to rebuild and rehabilitate after the horrors perpetrated in December 2008.

Through repeated incursions and military attacks, Israel, the occupying Power, is attempting to destroy all efforts to revitalize the peace process. That is also fuelling conflict, violence and tension, which will have dramatic implications and pose a serious threat to one and all. Moreover, those actions illustrate the attitude of the Israeli leadership towards the United Nations, international law and Palestinian civilians living under occupation.

Acts by the occupying authorities have reasserted the idea of impunity and disregard for international law. It is also quite clear that the Israeli leadership attaches no importance whatever to the outcome of the work of the Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, as evidenced by their repeated threats to launch an additional military attack against the civilian population in Gaza, which would be illegal and barbarous.

It is therefore necessary that the international community, including the Security Council, assume their responsibilities in this regard. It is necessary to defend the international order and to assert the international will that was expressed in resolution 1860 (2009) by ensuring that Israel implements the resolution. The Security Council must also address and directly condemn Israel's attacks on civilian lives, as well as its violations of international humanitarian law.

If we remain on the sidelines while those threats and attacks continue, the Israeli occupying authorities will be encouraged to add additional crimes to the list of war crimes that Israel has already perpetrated. Women, children and older persons in Gaza continue to suffer from the last Israeli war. They demand that a just and moral position be adopted, one that is based on the decisions of the international community, in particular those of the Security Council.

The Arab Group would like to underscore the gravity of the situation in occupied East Jerusalem as a result of the illegal steps and measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power. The situation there is worse now than at any time during 40 years of occupation. There has been a change in the demographic profile, the legal status and nature of the city as part of an attempt to create a new reality on the ground. That jeopardizes any final solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Before everyone's eyes, the Holy City is being subjected to an illegal aggressive policy by the Israeli occupying authorities seeking to control occupied East Jerusalem and ensure a Jewish majority there in a completely artificial way that excludes and displaces Palestinians, who were there from the very beginning. Palestinians are being forced to leave by having their identity cards taken, while more Israeli settlers are brought in. We see that reflected in statements from Israeli Government officials that assert that Jerusalem is, and will continue to be, Israel's capital. That is clearly and fully in violation of international law and

United Nations resolutions, which since 1967 have reiterated that the use of force to acquire territory is unacceptable.

Moreover, the occupying Power is continuing to establish settlements. The barrier that is being built, the closing of Palestinian institutions and the heightened acts of provocation at or near Holy Sites in Jerusalem, including the archaeological work that is threatening the foundations of Al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as the Church of the Nativity, are all illegal. They serve to raise tensions and inflame feelings, and they have the potential to worsen the tense and fragile situation in the occupied territories.

The international community, including the Security Council, must therefore address the situation before it is too late, firmly reject acts of provocation and take immediate and decisive steps to ensure that Israel implements international law, including its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention. There is no alternative to that; any other approach will imperil the peace process and the stability and security of the entire region. There can be neither negotiations nor peace unless we address the issue of Jerusalem.

We would like to reiterate that Israeli measures to change the legal, demographic and physical status of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and the infrastructure there are null and void. Israel is attempting to establish and enforce its legal and administrative power in the Golan. Such efforts are also null and void. We also reiterate that all those acts and measures, including the building of Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan, constitute a provocation of the entire international community. They also violate international law, the Charter of the United Nations and resolutions of the Organization, including Council resolution 497 (1981), and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We call on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and compel Israel to implement resolution 497 (1981) and fully withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967. The Arab Group condemns Israel's ongoing disregard of resolution 1701 (2006) as it violates Lebanon's sovereignty on the ground and from the air and the sea. It continues to occupy the northern part of Al-Ghajar village, the Shab'a farms and the Kfar Shuba hills. Israel's obstinacy extends to refusing to provide information on cluster bombs and landmines planted in south Lebanon.

The Arab Group supports Lebanon's request that the international community ensure Israel's implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and the transition from a situation of aggression to a total ceasefire. We have demonstrated the earnestness of our approach to the peace process through a variety of initiatives, including the Arab Peace Initiative, which was warmly welcomed internationally — except by Israel, which continues to ignore it eight years after it was launched.

The Arab Group welcomes all the efforts to relaunch the peace process in full earnest and reiterates the fact that the political process and the opportunity to open balanced and serious negotiations can begin only with the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from all Arab lands to the 1967 boundaries in order to create an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That will require that the international community, including the Security Council, seriously adopt a clear platform and a firm position in that regard that are critical to addressing Israel's illegal practices.

We must ensure in particular an immediate end to settlement activities in Jerusalem and all Palestinian territories, without exception. We must return to the legal terms of reference: international law and United Nations resolutions, particularly those regarding Jerusalem. The situation of refugees must also be resolved equitably, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). A time frame must be established for the completion of those negotiations. All this must be accomplished under effective international supervision.

These are not conditions; they are the starting point that every peace process requires. They have been endorsed by the international community and are based on the various terms of reference of the peace process, including the resolutions of the Security Council. To achieve these objectives, the international community, including the Security Council, must meet its direct responsibilities and intervene effectively and tangibly in order to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to adhere to international law and to its international responsibilities.

The first political necessity is to end all settlement activities, particularly in and around Jerusalem, and the incursions into Palestinian territory

and to lift the siege of Gaza. That will lend some credibility and seriousness to the political process, which is currently hindered by Israel's illegal practices on the ground and the international community's inability to act.

There is no excuse for the failure of the international community and the Security Council to take the measures and adopt the positions necessary to end all of this — the settlements, the incursions, the assassinations and the imposition of a new status quo. During George Mitchell's visit to the region, the Israeli Prime Minister told him that a university was to be built in the illegal settlement of Ariel, in the northern West Bank. That is being undertaken under the very nose of the international community.

The feverish settlement process has expanded seventeen times since the peace process was launched following the Annapolis Conference. Attempts to Judaize Jerusalem continue apace, with the destruction of houses and the transfer of the offices of international and non-governmental organizations. I could go on and on, listing all these aggressive Israeli policies.

Israel is totally out of control and is trying to resolve all these issues by continuing to occupy Arab lands, which naturally would undermine any negotiating process and hinder any future progress. What chance is Israel offering while it is destroying any basis for a future Palestinian State and preventing us from reaching any solution to the situation whatsoever? That was manifest, for instance, in the statement by the Israeli Prime Minister to the effect that Israel will remain in the West Bank and the Al-Aghwar region.

The Group of Arab States therefore calls on the international community, the Security Council and the Quartet to establish conditions conducive to peace by taking measures and adopting a clear and resolute position to protect the political process from the manoeuvring of the Israeli Government, which claims to seek talks but wants them to be completely insubstantial. It refuses to make any commitment and continues to defy the international community's efforts to salvage the peace process by continuing settlement activities in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Israel continues to ignore the terms of reference of the peace process, including resolution 1515 (2003), which enshrines the Road Map and calls on Israel to put an end to all settlement activity.

Given these very serious developments, we reiterate our firm rejection of all illegal acts and measures by the occupying Power, which are null and void. The international community and the Security Council must assume their moral and legal responsibilities for the Palestinian people until a just solution can be found and their suffering and the historic injustice done to them are over. The influential international stakeholders must take measures that go beyond timid rhetoric and good intentions. The occupying Power must be made to face up to its responsibilities and stop forthwith its illegal activities, which destroy any hope for the establishment of an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State living in peace with its neighbours within the borders of 1967.

The international community must therefore demonstrate the firm resolve and the political and diplomatic will to meet the situation squarely. It must not remain silent or continue to respond ineffectively and out of all proportion to the gravity of the situation. Such a response reflects a kind of tacit support and license for developments on the ground and clearly violates the resolutions of the Security Council and international law.

The time has come to oblige Israel, the occupying Power, to end its illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories and East Jerusalem and return to compliance with international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. This is a most serious issue, with severe consequences for international peace and security and for an inevitable peaceful solution.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): I have the pleasure to address the Security Council today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and to begin by expressing our thanks to Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his comprehensive briefing today, as well as NAM's sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General for attending that briefing today, stressing the importance of the subject under discussion and the urgency of our debate today, which comes at a crucial time when the peace process faces one of its most difficult stages in the international effort to realize the two-State solution and to put an end to the occupation of the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories since 1967.

The current crisis of confidence is a direct result of Israel's refusal to move decisively towards a political endgame and to implement its obligations according to United Nations resolutions and the Road Map, starting with a total freeze on all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Despite all credible and serious efforts by the Quartet and the regional partners to relaunch negotiations and to achieve comprehensive peace in the Middle East through the attainment of the two-State solution and the Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, a just and lasting settlement to the question of Palestine is still visibly far from being achieved due to Israel's positions and continued defiance of international law and Security Council resolutions.

As such, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, remains critical, continues to deteriorate and needs serious attention from this body to overcome the current impasse and to press on for the early resumption of the negotiating process. This critical situation has been recognized widely by neutral observers and the world's media.

The international community must be resolute in demanding that Israel abide by all its obligations under international law and cease all of its violations and unlawful measures, including its policy of collective punishment of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and its illegal settlement activities, and that it unambiguously negotiate and resolve all core issues — Jerusalem, settlements, the refugees, borders, security and water — in a comprehensive manner and within a fixed time frame.

Regrettably, since the last Security Council open debate on this issue in October 2009 (see S/PV.6201), Israel, the occupying Power, has failed to abide by its obligations and continues to impede efforts to resume peace negotiations by refusing to freeze all settlement activities and by continuing to impose unilateral measures aimed at altering the status, demographic composition and Arab nature of the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly East Jerusalem. Moreover, Israel has not refrained from measures that prejudice the outcome of negotiations on the final status issues, thus undermining confidence, inflaming tensions on the ground, preventing any progress and raising questions about Israel's credibility as a partner for peace.

The unacceptable decision of the Government of Israel to restrain rather than to cease completely all settlement activities, and even to exclude East Jerusalem from the scope of this unilateral decision, falls considerably short of Israel's obligations under Security Council resolutions, the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Road Map, particularly because settlement activity does not just violate international law but undermines trust, aims at prejudging the outcome of the future permanent status negotiations, and imperils the basis of the two-State solution. The Non-Aligned Movement condemns Israel's deliberate policy regarding the construction of more new settlement units and the continued Israeli declarations in this regard in defiance of repeated international calls to stop all settlement construction and activities.

In this regard, in the short period since the unilateral declaration by Israel on settlements, Israel has announced the construction of more then 1,600 new units, particularly in Jerusalem, in addition to the construction of thousands more already under way. The international community must use its political tools, including the Security Council, to take necessary measures to bring Israel into compliance.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses deep concern regarding the extensive damage caused by the Israeli settlements, the separation wall and the inhuman network of checkpoints, which are severing the Palestinian territory in the occupied West Bank into separate cantons, isolating East Jerusalem, undermining the contiguity, integrity, viability and unity of the Palestinian territory, and jeopardizing prospects for achieving the two-State solution.

Further, the Israeli authorities continue to discriminate against the Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, including by revoking identity cards and allowing violent Israeli settlers to attack Palestinians and confiscate their homes, properties and land, as well as to devastate their agriculture and desecrate their places of worship. The ongoing Israeli measures in occupied East Jerusalem have not only inflamed tensions in the holy city, but also have the potential of endangering the already fragile stability in the region as a whole.

Meanwhile, the unresolved crisis in Gaza also continues to have negative repercussions on all efforts

to advance the peace process and inflicts unacceptable suffering on the fabric of civilian life in Gaza. Israel continues to impose a blockade on the Palestinian civilian population, depriving them of their humanitarian needs and preventing Gaza's reconstruction one year after the unlawful attack in December 2008, in violation of international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and General Assembly resolution ES-10/18, adopted at its tenth emergency special session. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel immediately lift its illegal blockade and allow the immediate and sustained opening of all border crossings to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and to ensure its urgent reconstruction. The Non-Aligned Movement again stresses the urgent need immediately to begin reconstruction in Gaza and deeply condemns the obstruction by Israel of the import of essential reconstruction materials into Gaza, as well as Israel's negative response to the United Nations proposal to kick-start civilian reconstruction activity.

Further, the Non-Aligned Movement calls on Israel to compensate the Palestinian people for the damage and trauma they suffered during its military aggression on Gaza last year, along with compensating the United Nations for the human and material losses that occurred in that attack. The Non-Aligned Movement also reiterates its call for the restoration of the situation in the Gaza Strip to that which prevailed prior to June 2007, and stresses the importance and urgency of achieving Palestinian reconciliation and unity. In this regard, the Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its support for every effort to achieve a speedy Palestinian reconciliation, including Egyptian and regional endeavours to realize the just and legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people, with all its political groupings.

Turning to Lebanon, the Non-Aligned Movement remains deeply concerned over Israel's ongoing air and land violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, in breach of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), and calls on Israel to withdraw fully from the remaining occupied Lebanese land in the Shab'a farms, the Kfar Shuba hills and the northern part of Al-Ghajar village.

Concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structure, as well as the Israeli measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The Non-Aligned Movement has repeatedly warned of the danger and consequences of the ongoing Israeli measures in the region. It is vital at this juncture that the international community intervene and take a robust and united position in order to strengthen the process and to reaffirm the clear terms of reference for negotiations on all core issues that are grounded in the United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference and the agreements reached between the parties, starting with a total freeze on settlement activities.

Accordingly, the Non-Aligned Movement remains committed to supporting all endeavours that aim at ending occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security, in accordance with the established parameters of the peace process, as defined by Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008); the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace; the Arab Peace Initiative; and the Road Map. The Non-Aligned Movement calls for serious and concrete actions from the Security Council in this regard.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I call on the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Núñez Mosquera (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this very important meeting of the Security Council. We also thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing this morning.

We have to acknowledge the fact that little progress has been made since the last time the Security Council reviewed this question. The situation in the Middle East, and particularly in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, continues to be a matter of great concern. The ongoing illegal occupation by Israel of Palestinian and other Arab territories remains the major obstacle to

achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

Cuba reiterates its deep regret over the continued suffering of the Palestinian people under Israel's brutal military occupation and colonization for more than 40 years, as well as the fact that they continue to be denied their basic human rights, including the inalienable right to self-determination and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their lands, in accordance with international law and General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

In flagrant violation of international law, and contrary to the objectives of the peace process, the occupying Power continues its illegal construction of settlements and the wall throughout the West Bank and, in particular in and around East Jerusalem. Cuba is deeply concerned about Israel's continued demolition of Palestinian homes and eviction of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem, as well as other illegal acts of incitement, provocation and aggression by extremist settlers against the Palestinian population and holy places, which have made the present situation very unstable and dangerous.

The enormous physical, economic and social devastation that these illegal and destructive practices have wrought has a profound effect on the peace process and could also prejudice the outcome of an agreement on Jerusalem's final status. The situation in East Jerusalem is increasingly difficult and perilous. Israeli settlement activities are accelerating, and more than 5,000 people have lost their homes. The Palestinian population of East Jerusalem is growing, but they are forbidden to build and are forced to live in slum conditions, deprived of their most basic human rights.

The situation in the Gaza Strip following Israel's brutal attack a year ago continues to be of great concern. Israel's imposition of closures and restrictions to the free movement and access of people and goods, including humanitarian and medical supplies, has made the area's recovery and reconstruction practically impossible, and has also aggravated already precarious levels of unemployment and poverty. The ongoing siege in the Gaza Strip has left a million and a half people living under constant threat of death and deprived of the most basic services. More than 20 civilians have died so far this year because of Israeli hostilities, while 11,000 homes have been destroyed and hundreds of thousands are forced to live outdoors.

Cuba calls once again for Israel to lift its illegal blockade and allow the entry of supplies of all kinds into the Gaza Strip, enabling reconstruction to begin. These measures and policies carried out by Israel are serious, flagrant breaches of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and numerous General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, as well as the Advisory Opinion of 9 July 2004 of the International Court of Justice. Israel must forthwith cease all its offences against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and meet its obligations under international law, particularly international humanitarian and human rights law.

Cuba reaffirms that every measure or action taken by Israel with the purpose of changing the legal, physical or demographic condition and the institutional structure of occupied Syrian Golan, as well as any measure taken by Israel in order to impose its jurisdiction and administration over that territory, are null and void and carry no legal weight. We also reaffirm that all those measures and actions, including the illegal construction and expansion of Israel settlements in the Syrian Golan since 1967, are violations of international law, international agreements, the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981), and of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and are in defiance of the international community. Cuba demands that Israel withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

Israel cannot be allowed to continue to act with impunity. It is able to do so only because of the support it receives from the super-Power. Cuba supports the quest for a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and reiterates its hope that the current efforts will put an end to the occupation of all Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967, and enable the establishment of an independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I call on the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia): Mr. President, let me begin by expressing my delegation's appreciation to you and the members of the Council for convening this open debate on such an important issue. We also wish

to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing. My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of Syria on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

It has now been one year since the Israeli military incursion into the Gaza Strip. My delegation reiterates its endorsement of the report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (A/HRC/12/48). In this regard, Indonesia looks forward to the follow-up to the adoption on 5 November 2009 of General Assembly resolution 64/10. There is no doubt that Israel's excessive and disproportionate use of force and its policy of collective punishment are crimes against everything we stand for: the values of humanity and respect for the sanctity of the Charter. They are clear violations of international law and international humanitarian law. These are such sad and depressing circumstances when we, communities of democracies, communities of nations, are forced to act as bystanders. The list of the suffering of the Palestinian people caused by Israeli action is long and continues to grow by the day, the week and the year.

The irony of this issue is that the Council has abundant patience in taking its time to solve this very important question. Yet, when it comes to some other issues, it lacks patience and endurance. It acts decisively and with vigour, and we highly commend such "impatient" acts of the Council. We certainly wish that this impatience could be imposed on the Palestine issue.

While recognizing the multifaceted nature of the Middle East conflict, let me highlight two issues.

First, the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has continued to deteriorate since the end of the Israeli military incursion. The situation is pathetic because it is man-made. For years, Palestinians have deliberately been denied the true recovery and economic growth to fulfil their potential. The humanitarian suffering caused by the illegal blockade and the closure of the Gaza crossings by the Israeli authorities are well chronicled and are unacceptable. Indonesia therefore joins other countries and the Secretary-General in calling on Israel to end its policy of mayhem and to fully respect international law.

Secondly, Israel's settlement policies and practices, which are aimed at altering the demographic composition, physical character and status of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are nothing but a blatant violation of international law. As the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories continues and as Israeli settlers keep encroaching further into the territories, Palestinians watch with horror as their land claims disintegrate before their eyes, thus making a viable Palestinian State very difficult.

Israel must stop all settlement construction, expansion and planning in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and dismantle the settlements built therein, in compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. The settlement issue is the greatest obstacle to the peace process.

The conflict in the Middle East has indeed continued for far too long. The illegal Israeli occupation since 1967 has made the region a theatre of tension and violence. For many years, Indonesia has joined the international community in drawing attention to the consequences of Israel's continued illegal activity in the occupied Arab territories. We thus support the current surge in diplomacy, aimed at relaunching negotiations and jump-starting a comprehensive peace process, including the ongoing efforts of the United States.

We also recognize the role of the Quartet in promoting solutions to the conflict in the Middle East. Not least, we have consistently recognized the contribution of countries in the region and of the League of Arab States to Middle East peace efforts, including through the Arab Peace Initiative.

Unfortunately, the Security Council's own record on the issue has been less than sterling. The Security Council must, and indeed can, exert a positive influence on the Middle East peace process.

A truly comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East also requires a solution on the Israel-Lebanon and Israel-Syria tracks. My delegation therefore wishes to once again express its deep concern about Israel's ongoing land and air violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). We call on Israel to withdraw fully from the remaining Lebanese occupied land. We wish to make a similar call for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Finally, we wish to reaffirm our full support for a two-State solution that envisions the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with its neighbours. We fervently hope that 2010 will be the year when the international community fulfils its obligation to the Palestinian people and a year of remarkable progress and transformation in the history of the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to say how pleased my delegation is to participate in this meeting under the presidency of China, with its principled and patient stance on addressing the various issues before the Security Council. I would also like to thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing on the latest developments in the Middle East region.

The Security Council's regular monthly briefing on this issue comes at a time when the already dire humanitarian situation in Gaza is deteriorating and in the shadow of the lack of any sign of negotiations resuming in the near or medium term. My delegation would like to endorse the statements made by the representatives of Oman on behalf of the Arab Group, Syria on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. Given the responsibilities of His Majesty the King of the Kingdom of Morocco as Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, I would like to focus in my statement on the dire situation in Jerusalem and that of its Palestinian population owing to the Israeli authorities' determination to implement their plans seeking to change its heritage and its demographics and to seize Arab homes and property in that holy city.

With the ceasefire that followed the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009), the international community had hoped that Israel would put an end to its practices and halt the collective punishment of the Palestinian people and, indeed, its continuing attempts to impose a de facto situation and to annex Palestinian land, acre after acre. However, the opposite happened. Settlement activities have continued illegally in the West Bank, with Israelis seizing more Arab land and forcing Arab inhabitants to leave their homes to be replaced by Israeli settlers.

Regarding Jerusalem, Israel continues its policy of Judaization by confiscating more land in Arab neighbourhoods, persisting in building new units and facilities in the illegal settlements in Jerusalem, continuing to build the separation wall that divides Jerusalem's Arab inhabitants from their natural, political and demographic environment, demolishing homes and confiscating residency permits. Israel continues to target Islamic holy sites in the city through suspect archaeological excavations, by building a network of tunnels below the holy Al-Aqsa mosque on empty pretexts and by preventing worshippers from safely entering places of worship.

Over the past three months, we have followed with grave concern the increasing pace of land seizures in Jerusalem. Many statistics and documented reports are available, stating the number of Jerusalem inhabitants whose identity cards were withdrawn in 2008. During the same period, the Israeli authorities continued to issue permits to build new housing units in the illegal settlements in Jerusalem. Those unilateral and provocative acts seek to change the legal and demographic status of the holy city and obliterate its identity, violate international law and add to the tensions in the area, thus creating an explosive situation that could obstruct any progress towards the two-State solution advanced and advocated by the international community.

The Kingdom of Morocco draws the international community's attention to the dangerous situation in Jerusalem and the other occupied Palestinian territories. At the same time and based on the same responsibilities, commitments, international legal instruments and resolutions, it calls for wisdom and logic in addressing every aspect of the question of Jerusalem, which is of interest not only to Muslims, but to all those who follow monotheistic religions and are actively engaged in this world.

On that basis, we are concerned about the dangerous developments in the issue of Palestine and their impact on security and stability in the Middle East. Those concerns are counterbalanced only by our firm belief that the peace process is an inevitable choice and that its success is in the common interests of all the peoples of the region who wish to live in peace, harmony, cooperation. On the basis of that commitment, the Kingdom of Morocco will continue to work for peace in the Middle East. As a member of the committee to follow up the Arab Peace Initiative, it

takes part in all international negotiations towards a permanent and comprehensive peace that would include the final status issues, especially Jerusalem, as a major focal point of any possible solution.

The Kingdom also follows with great appreciation the efforts of United States President Barack Obama and his Special Envoy Senator Mitchell to overcome difficulties in the Middle East peace process. We look forward to these and other efforts to achieve the desired objective of restarting negotiations.

It is high time that the international community, the Security Council and the leading influential countries assume their responsibilities and prevail upon Israel to remove the obstacles to the negotiations and respond to efforts to resume the peace process, which must lead to a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and transform Jerusalem from a centre of conflict into a centre where the two States of Israel and Palestine can coexist side by side in peace and security. Such a just and comprehensive solution can be achieved only through Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories, including the Golan Heights and the rest of the occupied Lebanese territory.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Benmehidi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): I wish to thank you, Sir, for having organized this open debate at a time when the situation in the Middle East is of the greatest concern to my delegation and to the international community, due to both the ongoing tragic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and the lack of progress towards resuming the peace process.

My delegation associates itself with the statements made by the representatives of the Sultanate of Oman on behalf of the Group of Arab States and of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as that to be made by the representative of Syria on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Since the debate held by the Council in October 2009, (S/PV.6201) the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, has continued to deteriorate. Israel's unremitting resolve to create faits accomplis in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip appears increasingly to resemble a comprehensive and deliberate policy aimed at making the colonization project permanent and thus casts serious doubt on the true intentions of Israel's leaders, in contrast to their stated intention to resume negotiations with a view to achieving a sustainable peace agreement.

Precisely one year after the Israeli withdrawal, the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has continued to worsen despite the Council's adoption of resolution 1860 (2009) and the remarkable international mobilization in favour of its reconstruction. Yet Gaza's return to the status quo ante, characterized by the entrenchment of the blockade, has in fact prevented reconstruction work from getting off the ground and Israel continues to hinder the movement of people and the delivery of humanitarian aid and construction materials, thus preventing the resumption of normal life and increasing the already high levels of poverty and unemployment.

United with the Palestinian people and faithful to its approach to their just cause, Algeria has continued to call for an end to Israel's sinister plan, which seeks to impoverish and starve an entire sector of the Palestinian population and to cut it off from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory and from the international community.

With equal urgency, Algeria condemns the illegal and provocative measures taken by Israel in East Jerusalem in an unacceptable attempt to violate the city's age-old identity as a symbol of tolerance and dialogue and its status as the crossroads of the three revealed religions. It is particularly alarmed by the pursuit and development of a methodical policy of expropriation, intimidation and colonization aimed at strengthening Israel's control over that Palestinian city by altering its Arab nature and establishing a fait accompli on an issue related to the final status negotiations.

With the exception of Israel, the occupying Power, the international community in its entirety does not acknowledge the legitimacy of Israel's unilateral claims to the holy city, which remains an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel and whose fate is necessarily linked to the entire question of Palestine. The Security Council must reaffirm that the illegal unilateral measures taken by Israel to modify or attempt to modify the demographic composition, nature and status of the city are null and void under international law and must be condemned as such.

Because of Israel's obstinacy, the peace process is deadlocked and the objective of a two-State solution appears more elusive than ever. No significant progress has been made towards guaranteeing the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to establish a viable, independent State based on relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map. The international community, which has continually shown signs of exasperation in the light of Israel's deceitfulness and evasive responses, must find the means necessary to extricate the process from its current stalemate. Without minimizing the importance of resuming the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations called for by all, we note that no one desires meaningless negotiations to serve as a smokescreen for certain undeclared intentions aimed at perpetuating the status quo.

In our view, successful negotiations require three conditions to be met. First, the Israeli Government must commit itself sincerely and unequivocally to a two-State solution, underpinned by concrete improvements in the situation on the ground, beginning with the cessation of all illegal activities. Secondly, we must ensure respect for the terms of reference echoed and validated by United Nations resolutions, and which make up the indisputable elements of any settlement framework. All efforts must therefore seek to eliminate the remaining obstacles on the road to peace. Lastly and thirdly, we must define a clearer role for the Quartet, whose main task is to give positive momentum to the process by protecting it from the ups and downs of power struggles.

Algeria remains committed to any initiative that would put an end to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territory and other Arab territories, and the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living in peace with its neighbours within the parameters laid out by a settlement with a view to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, established by resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) and on the basis of the principles of the Arab Peace Initiative, in particular the principle of land-for-peace.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Wetland (Norway): Thank you, Mr. President, for allowing us to speak. In his briefing to the Security Council on 24 November 2009 (see S/PV.6223), Assistant Secretary-General Haile Menkerios stated that Israeli-Palestinian negotiations had reached "a deep and worrying impasse" and that without a political horizon, destructive forces would gain ground, putting both the Palestinian Authority and the two-State solution in peril.

This morning, Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco delivered what was, in fact, the same message. Consequently, two months have passed and little has changed in reality, notwithstanding partial measures on the ground, of which we have taken positive note. Unfortunately, we have to acknowledge that the current conditions do not yet allow for the resumption of final status negotiations.

This is not to say that we can simply give in to the seemingly insurmountable obstacles to getting the negotiations restarted. Inaction is clearly not an option. Other efforts must still be made to drive the process forward towards a two-State solution. We hope that the parties will respond positively and proactively to parallel endeavours by the international community to overcome the current political impasse in the peace process.

All along, steps in the right direction in some areas of the occupied Palestinian territories should not be reversed by detrimental action in others, including East Jerusalem. As for Gaza, the unacceptable and counterproductive grip holding the civilian population down must urgently come to an end.

As Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, Norway has repeatedly stressed the need for a clear political horizon in order to justify the high levels of international donor support to the Palestinian State-building project.

On the economic track, the donor community remains committed to the effort to build a Palestinian State from the bottom-up. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee has given its strong and unanimous support to Prime Minister Fayyad's plan for preparing for Palestinian statehood within two years. The implementation of this work is ongoing, in close contact with and coordination between the Palestinian Authority and the donor community. The plan thus forms an important platform for continued international support, notably within a set time frame. To keep the two-State solution clearly in sight, it cannot simply be

relegated to some distant and uncertain future, and the momentum must be upheld.

Mr. Bui The Giang (Viet Nam): I thank you, Mr President, for convening this open debate during this very first month of the year. I also thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, for his important briefing.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by Ambassador Abdelaziz of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

This month last year saw the adoption by this Council of resolution 1860 (2009) as a result of intensive negotiations among concerned parties following Israel's offensive on 27 December 2008 in Gaza. A year later, assessments of the situation in the Middle East once again attest to its severity on multiple fronts. No substantive progress has been made towards a durable ceasefire between the parties concerned, the required resumption of peaceful negotiations on final status or the sustained opening of border crossings. Israel has yet to cease its unilateral and provocative construction and expansion of settlements and the separation wall, its demolition of Palestinian homes and eviction of their families, and its revocation of residency permits, thus directly endangering and altering the demographic composition, character, nature and status of the occupied Palestinian territory. The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip remains shocking and is a causal effect of the restrictions and blockade imposed on the local population. The recent resurgence of sporadic rocket attacks against civilians in southern Israel again stirs up deep worries.

The vicious cycle of violence and counter-violence has sowed the seeds of confrontation, animosity and incitement for too long. In order to achieve a breakthrough into a new period in which an independent State of Palestine can thrive and all peoples in the region can co-exist in peace and security, all parties concerned should uphold their mutual obligations under the Road Map, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant Security Council resolutions. Constructive dialogue and political negotiations must be put first, whereas the military option should be excluded.

Israel must immediately freeze illegal settlement activity, dismantle outposts erected since March 2001, open all border crossings, release all Palestinian prisoners and facilitate humanitarian assistance and reconstruction efforts in Gaza. That State must do so with the utmost urgency and responsibility.

Palestinian factions must make sincere efforts to resolve their differences within the framework of intra-Palestinian reconciliation and jointly work towards the establishment of a Government of national unity. In the interest of long-term regional peace and justice, we reiterate our calls for all the parties concerned to strictly comply with international humanitarian and human rights law and conduct, without delay, credible domestic investigations into the many reported allegations of violations, as recommended by the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48).

In this overall situation, my delegation again acknowledges the intensified efforts of the Quartet, the League of Arab States, regional countries and the international community at large in helping to achieve a two-State solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict and to revitalize the Middle East peace process on all tracks.

We recognize the Palestinian National Authority's determination, under difficult circumstances, to embark on practical policies and measures to strengthen socioeconomic foundations, security sector reform and functional institutions for a future State. We join the repeated calls from the wider membership of the United Nations and from many different parts of the world for peace, reconciliation and mediation in the Middle East.

Turning to Lebanon, we welcome and support the efforts undertaken by the Lebanese Government to strengthen the national course of peace consolidation, socio-economic reconstruction and the normalization of external relations, and encourage the parties in Lebanon to jointly contribute to these endeavours. We demand that Israel immediately and unconditionally cease all violations of Lebanese independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, including by ceasing flights over Lebanese territory and withdrawing from the northern part of Al-Ghajar village and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line. We reiterate our support for the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

Finally, as it always has, Viet Nam continues to commit itself to joining the international community's collective efforts towards the peaceful settlement of the Israel-Palestine and Arab-Israeli conflicts and the

ultimate attainment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to Mr. Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Badji (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I congratulate you, Mr. President, on the exemplary and effective manner in which you are steering the work of the Council during this first month of the year. I also thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive and objective briefing on the situation in the Middle East, and on Palestine in particular.

Last week, at the first meeting of the Committee in 2010, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon drew the Committee's attention to the current state of peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. In particular, he emphasized that "if we do not move forward on the political process soon, we risk sliding backwards". The Committee fully shares that concern. We very much fear that the prospects for a resumption of negotiations are slipping away. Israel is determined to establish a state of affairs on the ground that appears to be irreversible, even on the very land where Palestinians are to establish their future State.

Today, it would seem that the Israeli Government's announcement on 25 November concerning what Prime Minister Netanyahu referred to as a policy of restraint for a period of 10 months was not made in good faith. Construction has continued apace in spite of that announcement. In addition, the Israeli Government continues to give financial support to established settlements. That temporary moratorium on the establishment of settlements moratorium explicitly excluded East Jerusalem, where settlement infrastructure is being expanded and consolidated while Palestinian residents are dispossessed, discriminated against and evicted.

I take this opportunity to remind Israel that the international community as a whole does not recognize its annexation of East Jerusalem. Resolution 252 (1968), which the Security Council adopted 42 years ago, clearly states that

> "all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, including expropriation of land and properties thereon, which tend to change the legal status of Jerusalem are invalid and cannot change that status". (*resolution 252 (1968), para. 2*)

The Committee welcomes the fact that major international stakeholders have recently reaffirmed that position of principle of the Council.

Unfortunately, one year after the end of Israel's Operation Cast Lead — whose violence and brutality are still fresh in our minds — Palestinians in Gaza continue to suffer the disastrous consequences of a war that was imposed on them by Israel. The nearly airtight blockade of the Gaza Strip continues. Israel allows the occasional entry of certain essential goods to pass crossings that it established and controls. The funds generously pledged by the international community at Sharm el-Sheikh for the reconstruction of Gaza have not yet reached the Palestinians for whom they were intended. The initiative of the Secretary-General to put United Nations agencies on the ground in charge of the most pressing reconstruction projects continues to be ignored by the occupying Power.

Various United Nations bodies, with the General Assembly in the lead, have raised the issue of responsibility for certain acts committed during the war in Gaza. First and foremost, the report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (A/HRC/12/48), which was established by the Human Rights Council and led by Justice Richard Goldstone, presented a comprehensive and balanced account of the events in Gaza. The Mission submitted ample and unbiased evidence that both Israel, the occupying Power, and Palestinian armed groups had committed serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law during the fighting, including some that should be prosecuted as war crimes.

The Committee supported the Mission's main recommendation that Israel and the Palestinians conduct impartial and credible investigations and prosecute those found responsible, as called for by the General Assembly in its resolution 64/10. We look forward to receiving the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of that resolution. The Committee calls on the Security Council to remain seized of this matter.

The Committee also encourages principled action by the international community aimed at ensuring

respect for the norms of international humanitarian law. In particular, the Committee calls on the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to fulfil their obligations under article 1 of the Convention, which requires them to respect and ensure respect for the Convention in all circumstances. In that regard, we welcome the efforts of the Swiss Government acting as depositary of the Conventions.

The main elements for resolving the problem that lies at the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory — are contained in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008). The continuing lack of political will to implement those resolutions has devastating consequences for the Palestinians in the occupied territories, for the Israeli people and for the region as a whole. The active involvement of the Security Council in bringing about a peaceful resolution of the conflict in accordance with the norms of international law is crucial. On behalf of the Committee, I urge the members of the Council to live up to the responsibility entrusted to them by the Charter of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Al-Allaf (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council this month. I also thank your predecessor for having wisely guided the work of the Council last month. We further thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, for his comprehensive and detailed briefing.

Jordan aligns itself with the statements made by the representatives of the Sultanate of Oman on behalf of the Group of Arab States and of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as with the statement to be made by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The peace process in the Middle East is at a critical phase and facing serious obstacles. Nevertheless, Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein, remains committed to working with the various international and regional actors to ensure peace and stability in the region on the basis of the two-State solution, which enjoys the unanimous support of the international community and has been reaffirmed in the many resolutions adopted by the Security Council.

The road to peace is very clear. It requires the international community to intensify its efforts to launch serious and effective talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis. The negotiations must address the various issues related to final status, including borders, Jerusalem, refugees, security and water. They must take place as soon as possible; begin at the point where previous negotiations ended and on the basis of a monitoring and verification system with a clear calendar; and lead to the creation of an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State on Palestinian national territory, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the 1967 borders and living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

In that respect, Jordan reaffirms the important and ongoing leadership role being played by the United States of America and the efforts undertaken by the Quartet to ensure that the talks are relaunched in an effective manner, lead to the two-State solution, and establish a comprehensive regional peace based on the mandates and terms of reference of the international community and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Despite the upsurge in diplomatic and political activity in the region and world capitals to promote the relaunching of the talks, Israel is pursuing its unilateral policies in the occupied Palestinian territories. These policies in no way indicate any desire for peace on its part, are manifestly ineffective and have proven to be a failure in settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If Israel wants to convey a genuine desire for peace, it must immediately end practices that contradict its stated positions. These are the actions of an occupying Power and thereby contradict international law. International law, international humanitarian law and human rights law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War, must all be respected.

The Assistant Secretary-General's briefing stressed Israel's ongoing settlement activity and expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly East Jerusalem. Such activity reflects the will to create a new reality on the ground, in clear contravention of international humanitarian law and of Israel's commitments under the Road Map. The Israeli settlements are a burden on and obstacle to the movement of Palestinians and economic development

and growth in the Palestinian territories. They give rise to increased tension and exacerbate a situation in which trust is already sorely lacking. They also represent a major obstacle to international and regional efforts to relaunch the negotiations, and even jeopardize the possibility of a peaceful solution and the future of a contiguous, independent and viable Palestinian State. We therefore demand that Israel put a complete and immediate halt to all its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, in particular East Jerusalem and including so-called natural growth.

Today's meeting is an opportunity to draw the international community's attention to one of the most serious issues facing the region: illegal Israeli practices in East Jerusalem. These practices have endured throughout the decades of occupation, during which Israel has refused to live up to its legal commitments. As the occupying Power, Israel has refused to respond to the repeated appeals of the international community and imposed its own rules and settlement policies. It has clearly violated the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular the resolutions of the Security Council, often creating a vicious and sanguinary circle.

Israel has continued its illegal practices in East Jerusalem, including its archaeological excavations at Muslim and Christian holy sites, particularly in and around Al-Haram Al-Sharif. It has also continued under various pretexts to destroy houses, expel Arab inhabitants, close Palestinian institutions and deprive Palestinians of their right to remain in the holy city by confiscating their identity cards. These measures are all part and parcel of a broader policy to enhance Israeli control over the city, create a new reality on the ground, and alter the demographic profile of occupied East Jerusalem.

The influential international actors must stop these Israeli practices. It is of great importance that the international and regional protagonists understand the negative impact of these Israeli activities on the Islamic world. Israel must cease forthwith its violations of the status of East Jerusalem, in particular by abandoning its practice of increasing the Jewish population there and of seeking to weaken the city's Islamic character. Such activities, which violate international law — especially the Fourth Geneva Convention — threaten the future of the holy city and jeopardize the possibility of a peaceful settlement, must end.

For the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein, the status of the city is a red line that must not be crossed. The protection of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem itself, are top priorities for Jordan. We will take every step necessary to protect Islamic and Christian holy sites there. The restoration and maintenance of those sites and the protection of the city's Arab identity are crucial, and any attempt to make it a Jewish city will be opposed. Jerusalem must remain a symbol of peace and peaceful cohabitation. It plays a role of singular importance in the lives of millions of Muslims and Christians throughout the world. The repeated provocations and illegal acts could lead to a situation that would threaten the foundations of international peace and security, the maintenance of which is of course the main task of the Security Council.

It has been a year since the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip. The repercussions of that aggression continue to be tangible for our brothers in the Gaza Strip, where they live in despair, poverty, hunger and privation in many forms. The situation in the Gaza Strip has now reached the level of a humanitarian catastrophe. Our brothers there are suffering on a daily basis, lacking even the basic means for survival. Any progress in the peace efforts requires a radical change in the tragic situation of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip. The international community must take immediate and effective steps to guarantee that Israel implement resolution 1860 (2009), that it lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip, authorize the launching of reconstruction and economic recovery projects, allow the entry of medical supplies, food, agricultural products, fuel and construction materials, permit the sick to reach hospitals and allow civilians their freedom of movement.

Jordan and His Majesty the King continue their numerous efforts to engage with the international community and urge it to put an end to the dreadful suffering of the Palestinian people. We call upon the international community to provide the assistance required to improve living conditions there and ensure that they do not deteriorate even further. We appeal to the international community to shoulder its humanitarian and legal responsibility to guarantee the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Palestinian territories, and to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to put an end to their suffering.

The Security Council plays an essential role in providing assistance and political support to regional and international efforts to relaunch negotiations leading to a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question, which is at the heart of the situation in the Middle East. A resolution of the Palestinian question is the key to all the conflicts in the region. If the efforts towards peace fail, there will be catastrophic consequences for the region and its peoples. Any failure in establishing peace and putting an end to this conflict will exacerbate extremism and pose a threat to the peace and security of the Palestinians and Israelis and indeed of all peoples in the region, as well as to broader international peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Tarar (Pakistan): The Pakistan delegation would like, Sir, to congratulate you on the successful Chinese presidency of the Security Council for this month and on your having convened this important meeting. We would also like to congratulate the new non-permanent members of the Security Council: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Gabon, Lebanon and Nigeria. We wish them success.

The Middle East is the sacred birthplace of great religions of our world. It resonates with the kinder nature of the relationship of eternal God with mortal beings. It is wrapped in overarching spirituality and religious good. Its symbols are blessed decorations in millions of homes around the globe. Its divinity demands that it be a land of peace and love, in contrast to the reality of its being the abode of unending conflicts and the epitome of human political failure. That failure has given birth to difficult religious, philosophical and political questions. It has called into question the notion of limitless human ingenuity. The very concept of intrinsic human good has been torn apart by the brutalities committed in this land. In the turmoil of the Middle East we mortal beings have been exposed at our worst, in all our callousness, cruelty and brutality.

The consequences of our collective failure in the Middle East are disastrous for the region and beyond. Adding to pessimism about our humanity is the continuing gravity of the situation on the ground in terms of the humanitarian plight of the Palestinian people. Amidst this human tragedy, the ongoing provocative and aggressive actions of Israel in East Jerusalem have compounded the plight of the Palestinian people and made a political settlement all the more difficult.

There is recognition of the fact that a just settlement of the Palestinian question is central to ending the cycle of suspicion and discord that has undermined peace and security in the Middle East and has also strained the relations between neighbours in the region. The question is how to convert this growing international consensus into credible action that would bring to fruition this arduous search for peace. An immediate end to the illegal practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people is the most important prerequisite for building an environment of trust and confidence. Trust and confidence, together with active engagement of the international community, represent the only way forward for the peace process and progress towards a two-State solution in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

There is no option but to return to the negotiating table. Efforts to create new facts on the ground that prejudice the outcome of negotiations are neither recognized by nor acceptable to the international community. We should also learn from the half-hearted attempts, unfulfilled promises and aborted peace processes of the past. Greater political will is required to bring the parties together and help them engage in a sustained negotiation process, in good faith and without preconditions, aimed at achieving within a reasonable time frame a comprehensive agreement.

In accordance with its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council has a significant and crucial role in supporting the efforts for renewed negotiations and their successful conclusion. I wish to conclude by reiterating Pakistan's full support for this objective and our strong commitment to the realization of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Argüello (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, Sir, I would like to thank you for this opportunity for non-members of the Security Council to express their viewpoints on the situation in the Middle East and the Palestinian question. I would also

like to congratulate you on your work as President of the Council for the month of January. Allow me as well to thank in particular the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, for his thorough briefing this morning. We would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been in the agenda of the Security Council for more than 60 years. Taking into account the time that has passed and the situation of instability that it provokes, it is of high priority to achieve a lasting peace in that region, which would lead to the establishment of a viable, democratic and contiguous Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel, in peace and security, in conformity with Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Argentina recognizes the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to build a viable and independent State. In this regard, we insist that Israel must cease its military operations in the occupied territories, as well as all practices that contravene international law, ending its policy of illegal settlements and the construction of the wall. We also recognize the right of the State of Israel to live in peace with its neighbours, within safe and internationally recognized borders, and, at the same time, we condemn terrorist actions of Palestinian armed groups against the Israeli civilian population.

Argentina believes that restarting the peace process will require the support of the international community, as well as the active mediation of the United States, with a view to putting an end to illegal settlements, finding a solution to the Jerusalem issue and promoting international support for addressing the question of possible compensation for Palestinian refugees. In this context, Argentina values the efforts of the United States Middle East Envoy, George Mitchell, to restart the peace talks with a view to making effective progress towards the establishment of two States as a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We also believe that the Arab League's land for peace proposal contains a core of initiatives that could help the peace process move forward, and we hope Israel will take them into consideration.

We also express our disappointment at the difficulties that appear as we try to move ahead with the peace process and resolve all the final status issues, including Jerusalem. In this regard, Argentina is concerned about high-level Israeli authorities' expressed refusal to freeze the building of settlements and proclamation of Israel's presence in the Jordan Valley. On another issue, my country has repeatedly expressed its concern with the deepening humanitarian crisis affecting the Palestinian people and by the failure to implement resolution 1860 (2009); because of this, we participated actively in the donor conferences in Paris in December 2007 and Sharm el-Sheikh in March.

After the Israeli attack on Gaza between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009, the Human Rights Council decided to set up a Fact-Finding Mission for Gaza, which produced the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48). At its sixty-fourth session, the General Assembly, with the positive votes of 114 members, among them Argentina, adopted its resolution 64/10, endorsing the report of the Human Rights Council, which approved the Goldstone report and called on the parties to carry out credible investigations into the events that led to the convening of the twelfth special session of the Council and the subsequent report.

Argentina's vote in this regard must be considered in the context of our own recent history, which prompts Argentina, in every appropriate forum, to support objective and complete investigations when violations of international law and international humanitarian law are in question. In accordance with our principles and convictions, we could not refuse to support the request that the United Nations investigate accusations of war crimes on both sides during Operation Cast Lead.

We hope that this open debate of the Security Council will provide a new impetus for restarting the Middle East peace process, which requires the strong and determined support and commitment of the international community.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that Argentina's commitment to human rights and the fight against impunity has led it to become a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. On this International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, we would like in this forum to pay tribute to the victims, as we do every year in our country.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Allow me at the outset, Sir, to congratulate you warmly on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to extend the warm congratulations of the OIC to the new members of the Security Council: Lebanon, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Gabon and Nigeria. I would also like to express the OIC's appreciation to the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, for the decent, sober and genuine briefing he gave this morning.

The OIC expresses its serious concerns about the grave situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular the continuing inhumane Israeli blockade and dire humanitarian crisis being imposed on the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip, and the ongoing illegal and still unpunished colonization campaign being carried out by Israel, the occupying Power, in the West Bank, particularly in and around Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The international community has repeatedly witnessed and condemned Israel's illegal measures in the occupied Palestinian territory, at the forefront of which is Israel's untrammelled, deliberate campaign to change the Palestinian Arab identity and character of the holy city of Al-Quds. These activities, deemed null and void by the international community, include, but are not limited to: the ongoing settlement activities; the persistent aggression against Islamic and Christian holy places in Al-Quds Al-Sharif; the continued construction of the separation wall; the revocation of Palestinian residency rights in the city; the eviction of Palestinian families from the city; the demolition of Palestinian houses; the imposition of severe restrictions on movement, which has already isolated the city from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory; and continued dangerous and provocative digging and excavation work in and around the Al-Aqsa mosque and its vicinity.

The OIC strongly condemns these Israeli violations and calls for the immediate cessation of all such illegal Israeli activities in accordance with the occupying Power's obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and the many relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, of which, as members know, there are hundreds, including 37 Security Council resolutions. In this regard, the OIC recalls, inter alia, Security Council resolutions 446 (1979), 465 (1980) and 478 (1980), which all remain valid and must be implemented.

The OIC recalls paragraph 4 of resolution 2/36-PAL, adopted at the thirty-sixth ministerial meeting of the OIC in Damascus, in which the members reaffirmed that all the Israeli colonial settlement measures and practices in Al-Quds and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory are null and void, in line with the resolutions of international legitimacy, as well as international covenants and conventions that consider all Israeli legislative, administrative and colonial settlement procedures and measures aimed at altering the legal, demographic, architectural, cultural and heritage-related status of the holy city to be illegitimate. The resolution urgently requests the Security Council to revive the International Supervision and Monitoring Committee to prevent and prohibit colonial settlement in Al-Quds and the occupied Arab territories.

We also strongly condemn the attacks by the Israeli occupying forces, including extremist aggressive settlers under the supervision of the occupying Power, perpetrated against Palestinian civilians and worshippers at Al-Aqsa mosque and the Al-Haram Al-Sharif compound in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The OIC emphasizes that the question of the holy Haram in Al-Quds is a red line that cannot be addressed with laxity or the subject of any debate, and that any provocative or illegal unilateral actions against the holy Al-Aqsa mosque will have very serious repercussions for the Islamic world and be likely to destabilize the region.

The OIC calls upon the international community, particularly the Security Council, to shoulder its responsibilities, especially towards occupied Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and to take urgent action to bring a complete halt to all illegal Israeli measures and actions aimed at changing the demographic composition, character, geographic nature and legal status of the holy city.

One year ago, the international community witnessed with horror the Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip that killed and injured thousands of besieged unarmed Palestinian civilians, including children, and caused vast destruction to property, infrastructure and agricultural land. The OIC welcomes the adoption of resolution 64/10 of 5 November 2009 by the General Assembly on the follow-up to the report

of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict. The group is of the view that that resolution constitutes an important first step in pursuing accountability for those Israeli violations, which were authenticated and confirmed by evidence in the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48). Thus, further action should be taken by the relevant United Nations organs and bodies, including the Security Council, in order to bring the Israeli perpetrators of those crimes to justice and to put an end to Israel's impunity and above-the-law attitude.

The OIC condemns Israel's inhumane and unlawful blockade of the Gaza Strip and expresses serious concern about the grave deterioration of the socio-economic conditions and the deepening of the humanitarian crisis of the Palestinian civilians due to the blockade. The OIC calls on Israel, the occupying Power, to end its collective punitive measures imposed on the civilian population in Gaza. It calls for the immediate lifting of Israel's unjust blockade and the opening of all crossing points with Gaza, in accordance with international law and all United Nations resolutions, in order to ensure the free access of humanitarian aid and other essential supplies and goods, including commercial supplies and necessary reconstruction materials, and to facilitate the crossing of persons to and from Gaza.

The OIC remains deeply concerned by Israel's ongoing air and land violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, in breach of resolution 1701 (2006), and calls on Israel to withdraw fully from the remaining Lebanese occupied land in the Shab'a farms, the Kfar Shuba hills and the northern part of Al-Ghajar village.

The OIC also reaffirms that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structure, as well as Israeli measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect. The OIC demands that Israel abide fully and immediately by Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, also in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The OIC calls for an intensification of efforts by the international community, including this Security Council in line with its Charter responsibilities, aimed at accelerating the process of achieving a just and comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

In that regard, the OIC reiterates its firm and unwavering support for the establishment of the State of Palestine based on commitment to the right of sovereignty over the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and for a just solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Shafi (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your successful presidency of the Security Council for this month. I thank you for convening this meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, in the form of an open debate, which affords us the opportunity to participate. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing. Allow me to associate my delegation with the statements made by the representatives of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, of Syria on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and of Oman on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

We meet today a year after the Israeli military assault on the Gaza Strip, the so-called Operation Cast Lead, and the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009). The fact that one year has passed since that criminal operation does not mean that it has been forgotten. The crimes that have been and continue to be committed in Gaza and throughout the occupied Palestinian territories are violations of international law. They are subject to no statute of limitations and should not be forgotten, even with the passage of time. How can such violations be forgotten when they continue to be committed in various forms, in particular the unjust siege imposed on an entire people?

Israel's military forces have caused massive destruction and damage to various infrastructures in the Gaza Strip, whose population of over 1.5 million was already suffering from shortages of food and health supplies. The siege imposed on the Strip continues to

hinder the access of humanitarian supplies and basic building materials to the Strip.

The State of Qatar was one of the first countries to take the initiative to help our Palestinian brothers in the Gaza Strip to overcome that humanitarian disaster. However, financial support is useless unless it can reach its beneficiaries.

Although the Human Rights Council has acted in response to the events that occurred in the Gaza Strip last year and is still considering the issue, it is more incumbent on this Council to act, because the question of Palestinian lies at the heart of its mandate and is one of its main agenda items. The report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (A/HRC/12/48), mandated by the Human Rights Council to investigate war events in Gaza, has clearly shown the gravity of the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed in Gaza. Our humanitarian conscience requires us to ensure that the perpetrators of such crimes do not go unpunished. For its part, the Security Council has taken no concrete action on the recommendations in the report of the Board of Inquiry established to investigate the targeting of United Nations premises and facilities during that act of aggression (see S/2009/250).

It seems clear to all that the continued military occupation is the root of the problem and that that occupation will not provide security for Israel. It causes the worst violations of human rights perpetrated against an unarmed and oppressed people under the pretext of combating violence and terrorism, when in fact it is one of the root causes of terrorism. The claim that excessive military force can serve to protect the security of Israel is false, because the right to struggle for liberation from foreign occupation is a legitimate right that cannot be equated with military aggression by occupation forces.

We stress our firm rejection of Israel's illegal measures in occupied East Jerusalem and its attempts to change the city's Arab identity, demographic composition, legal status and religious character. We stress that all such attempts remain null, void and without any legal effect. The international community must reject the attempts by the Israeli Government to desecrate Islamic and Christian Holy Sites, demolish houses in the city, expel its Arab residents and confiscate their identity cards in order to Judaize the city. Those attempts violate Israel's obligations, as the occupying Power, under international law, are contrary to relevant United Nations resolutions and undermine the foundations of a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Furthermore, such measures disrupt international efforts for an alliance of civilizations.

Israeli authorities continue to commit numerous human rights violations against Arab populations within the so-called Green Line and to defy the international consensus on the need to cease building and expanding the illegal settlements in an effort to annex more Palestinian land, de facto. Those actions undermine international mediation efforts, in particular those of the Quartet.

The State of Qatar believes that resolution of the Palestinian issue can come only through the establishment of two States living side by side in peace and security. We believe that the Israeli Government's attempts to expand settlements, particularly in and around East Jerusalem, undermine efforts for a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders because they threaten the contiguity of the Palestinian territory, which is an essential component of a viable Palestinian State.

The Israeli Government seeks to justify the expansion of settlements with what it calls natural growth. However, let me emphasize Qatar's rejection of such a concept altogether, because such settlement activity is fundamentally illegal and that growth is not natural, since Israeli public policy encourages the colonization of the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly East Jerusalem, by offering Government subsidies and incentives to encourage the transfer of its civilian population to the Palestinian territory, in contravention of international law.

We must also note the continued Israeli violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, in contravention of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), and the ongoing Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory and the Syrian Golan. We reiterate that the Israeli decision to annex the Golan is null and void. The Golan must be returned to Syria, just as the remaining occupied Lebanese territories must be returned to Lebanon.

The establishment of a lasting, comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East can be based only on the principle of land for peace, the Madrid terms of reference, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. The Arab Peace Initiative was

reaffirmed at the Doha summit in March 2009, with a reference indicating that the Arab side will continue to bring it forward conditioned on its acceptance by the Israeli side. Therefore, the new Israeli Government must refrain from taking extreme positions. It must take advantage of the goodwill on the Arab side in order to end the crisis in the Middle East.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the need to involve all of the Palestinian people in the peace process to ensure its success. The Palestinians must seriously pursue everything that will help to foster national unity in their own interest and guarantee a unified Palestinian territory, both geographically and politically. We would be remiss not to salute and express our pride in our brothers and sisters, the Palestinians, who remain steadfast in the face of occupation, injustice and oppression.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mashabane (South Africa): My delegation welcomes the opportunity to participate once again in the Security Council debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Allow me to extend our congratulations to you, Mr. President, for the able manner in which you have steered the Council's work during this month. We also wish to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his briefing today.

At the outset my delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

For over 60 years the question of Palestine has been on the agenda of the Security Council. During that period a number of important resolutions have been passed and many peace processes initiated. However, as reported here today and as evidenced by the recent Israeli air strikes in Gaza, peace still eludes the Middle East. My Government has noted with concern the latest round of Israeli air strikes in the Gaza Strip and has registered its condemnation in the strongest possible terms. Those obstructionist actions on the part of Israel are hostile to the concerted efforts to achieve a negotiated solution to the conflict in the Middle East. We therefore maintain that there can be no military solution to the conflict.

Those actions are yet again proof of Israel's disregard for international law, and they fuel the growing international frustration. They also come in the wake of the report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (A/HRC/12/48) and the subsequent resolutions adopted by the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly that indicate that impunity for violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law cannot and will not be tolerated. We therefore reiterate our call on all parties concerned to implement the recommendations of the Fact-Finding Mission.

These hostile activities and disproportionate use of force pose a serious obstacle to achieving a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the Palestinian question. South Africa maintains that the creation of a viable and independent Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, existing alongside the State of Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders, as well as the complete withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories, including the West Bank and East Jerusalem, are the only means of finding a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflict. This is in line with international agreements, including a number of Security Council resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid conference, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

To realize this objective, the Governments and peoples of Israel and Palestine have to refrain from activities that could jeopardize or derail the peace process. We are concerned about the continuing impasse in negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli leadership, and therefore call on the parties to create conditions conducive to the resumption of negotiations.

The ongoing military occupation of the Palestinian territory and Arab territories and the denial of self-determination to the Palestinian people are the primary sources of insecurity and instability in the Middle East. South Africa reaffirms its support for Palestine's right to self-determination and independence and will continue to pledge our support for the implementation of international initiatives, including the Arab Peace Initiative, the relevant Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

Is it not about time that this body, the Council, in accordance with its mandate, consider concrete and practical steps towards the resolution of the Middle East situation, in particular the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Debates have been conducted, statements

made and resolutions adopted on the situation in the Middle East, but no meaningful progress has been made thus far.

South Africa condemns the continued illegal Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the facts being created on the ground, which could prejudice the final status negotiations and present an obstacle to the peace process. It is therefore the view of South Africa that the continuing illegal Israeli settlement activities in Gaza and East Jerusalem do not help the situation insofar as the negotiations on the final status are concerned.

To this end, the continued blockade imposed on Gaza has dire humanitarian consequences for ordinary Palestinians, their economic livelihood and the reconstruction of Gaza. We call on Israel to immediately lift this blockade and open the border crossings to alleviate the humanitarian crisis.

With regard to the separation wall, we have always been of the view that its existence does not constitute a legitimate security measure, and we wish to express our disappointment that the Government of Israel has yet to comply with the findings of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory. Equally, the ongoing home demolition programme constitutes a serious violation of international law.

In conclusion, the international community, and the Security Council in particular, have an obligation to protect the weak, promote peace and seek a lasting solution to this long-standing conflict. The absence of long-lasting peace therefore demands that we redouble our efforts to achieve this goal.

Likewise, the Palestinian and Israeli people and Governments have the responsibility and duty to create a climate conducive to resuming negotiations without delay. It remains our view that the crisis in the Middle East region cannot be resolved outside of the resolution of the Palestinian question. Therefore, it is critical that all efforts be geared towards a lasting solution to the unwavering struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination, peace, human rights and prosperity.

For its part, South Africa will continue to support all efforts of the concerned parties and the international community. South Africa can only hope that, as we begin the second decade of the twenty-first century, the international community, including the Security Council, will do its best to assist the people of Palestine to achieve their long-held aspiration to self-determination, independence and freedom.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Ali (Malaysia): Mr. President, let me, at the outset, congratulate you on your leadership of this Council and express how pleased we are to see you presiding over this meeting today.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the representatives of Egypt and Syria on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, respectively.

Since the most recent debate on this item, held in October 2009 (see S/PV.6201), and despite the so-called 10-month moratorium, Israeli authorities continue to announce plans to build hundreds upon hundreds of settlement units in the West Bank, particularly in East Jerusalem. The construction of the separation wall in and around occupied East Jerusalem has continued unabated despite the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004. Concomitantly, illegal land confiscations and countless other unlawful measures continue, including home demolitions and the eviction of Palestinian families.

Furthermore, the ongoing revocation of the residency rights of Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem has further worsened the situation. In 2008 alone, Israel revoked the residency rights of nearly 5,000 Palestinians, forbidding them from living in the very city of their birth. This figure represents the highest number of residency revocations in a one-year period since the occupation began in 1967. Tens of thousands more Palestinian Jerusalemites are under the threat of having their residency rights revoked.

All these illegal policies and the affirmation by the Israeli Prime Minister that Israel will retain parts of the occupied West Bank will definitely change the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory and seriously undermine the two-State solution. Such actions are in grave violation of international law, the Fourth Geneva Convention and relevant United Nations resolutions. In this regard, Israel must be held accountable.

With regard to Gaza, the humanitarian situation there remains dire. The blockade effectively imprisons

the people of Gaza, deprives them of essential needs, including the construction materials that are necessary to rebuild their homes and other vital infrastructure destroyed during the Israeli military aggression of more than a year ago. This illegal blockade, which is a form of collective punishment forbidden by international law, must be brought to an end. In this regard, we again urge the Security Council to take action to end the siege, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009).

Resolving these issues requires us to focus our energies and efforts on restoring to the Palestinians their inalienable rights, including their right to an independent State of their very own. This in turn requires all parties to act sincerely to achieve the objective of a just and lasting solution and action to be taken by the Security Council to restore peace and stability in the Middle East. Needless to say, this requires the political will of this Council to implement its very own resolutions on this issue.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Algahrah (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his important briefing this morning and for the information he provided. The briefing highlighted the gravity of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories at all levels and the suffering of the Palestinian people, which has become clear to this Council and every member of the international community.

We would also like to associate ourselves with the statements made by the representatives of the Sultanate of Oman on behalf of the League of Arab States, of Syria on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

A full year has elapsed since the start of the war launched by the Israeli occupation forces on Gaza and the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009). Despite all the assistance extended to reconstruct Gaza, which has been blocked by the occupation forces, the widespread and brutal destruction is still visible to all. Israel continues its policy of collective punishment against the population of the Gaza Strip. It continues to block the reconstruction of Gaza in the wake of the destruction caused by the war unleashed by Israel. It continues to close crossing points, erect new checkpoints and build the separation wall. All those practices by the Israeli occupiers clearly reflect continued Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people.

Decades of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory have created a tragic situation for the Palestinian people, in which, for many, life and death have amounted to the same thing and in which hope for a better future has dissipated. Those decades of occupation have engendered a climate of frustration and injustice and an environment marked by the worst human suffering imaginable and by a lack of dignity and the rule of law. In that environment, killing, depopulation and the plundering of wealth have become the norm.

Ever since when Israel announced its annexation of Jerusalem in 1967, a bitter sequence of events began to change the demographics and the character of the Holy City, with the Judaization of the city and its depopulation of Arab residents. In 2008, Israel confiscated the identity cards of 5,000 Palestinians, on the pretext that they reside beyond the municipal limits of Jerusalem. It intends to do the same to between 50,000 and 100,000 Palestinians in the near future. This Judaization, depopulation and confiscation of residency permits can only be described as ethnic cleansing.

Israel has long operated beyond the framework of international law, the principles of the United Nations and international humanitarian law, including by enshrining the concept of "natural growth" — which amounts to natural extermination. The situation in East Jerusalem is deteriorating day by day. The demolition of houses, depopulation and the confiscation of identity cards are intended to change the natural features, demographic character and legal status of the city.

Whenever we consider the Palestinian question, we condemn the continued settlement activities and call for an immediate end to them, including so-called natural growth, and for the removal of all settlement outposts established since 2001. Today we reaffirm that the establishment and construction of settlements is illegal under international law. This represents an obstacle to peace — indeed, to the first step towards peace, which is negotiations. There can be no negotiations while settlements are being built at a feverish pace, thereby imposing a new reality that will make any future resolution of the Palestinian question impossible. If we understand the facts about the

settlements and why they are being built, and if we understand the policy of Israel, then a condition for a return to negotiations is a complete halt to settlement activity, especially in East Jerusalem. If Israel continues to claim that it wishes to resume negotiations and that it is committed to peace, its first gesture should be an immediate halt to all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, along with the dismantlement of existing settlements.

In an earlier statement, the Secretary-General declared the settlements to be illegal and called upon Israel to fulfil its Road Map obligation to freeze all settlement activity, including so-called natural growth, and to eliminate all outposts established since March 2001. The Quartet has called upon Israel to halt the settlements and has requested the countries sponsoring the peace process to work to put a stop to the settlements. Also, we have called upon all countries of the world to help put a stop to them.

Has the Security Council translated these appeals into actions? Will the Council not heed the concerns and positions stated by so many countries by compelling Israel to stop settlement activity and remove existing settlements? Saudi Arabia is concerned by the complete inaction by the Security Council in the face of Israel's policy of State terrorism. This reflects duplicity and double standards — at the expense of the rule of law and respect for international legality in relations among countries. The Security Council faces a deadlock, as its resolutions cannot be implemented. This is another outcome of double standards in relations among countries and of the use of the veto to paralyse the Council and render it unable to serve the interests of those countries affected by this situation.

If the Council breaks this deadlock, then all States Members of the United Nations will respect its resolutions. That would restore the Council's credibility and its role in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Ms. Medina-Carrasco (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish, Mr. President, to express our satisfaction at the way in which you, the representative of the People's Republic of China, are guiding the work of the Security Council during the month of January. We thank you for having organized this meeting to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

The Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations fully supports the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We consider that the report by the Secretariat on the critical situation in the Middle East, in particular in Palestine, is most timely. This situation is a result of the systematic refusal by the Israeli governing class to respect international law or the Palestinian people's right to peace and territorial integrity, or to respect the rights of Syria and Lebanon. The Government of Israel does not seem to realize that by practicing its malicious policies it is ignoring its own history and showing distrespect for it.

We believe in peace built by peoples. Peace is not imposed by force, by threats or by war. In our capital, two major houses of worship are separated by a few metres: a mosque and a synagogue. There, the faithful gather to practice their religion. That scene is duplicated in many countries around the world. But it does not seem to be the case in the Middle East. We have to ask ourselves why.

We wish to stress before the Security Council that Governments of goodwill are demanding the achievement of a lasting peace in the region. Within its mandate under the Charter, the Security Council must demand that Israel, the occupying Power, comply with General Assembly resolutions on the Middle East and withdraw from all the occupied territories. It is crucial that Israel put a permanent end to the policy of extermination against the Palestinian people that it has been carrying out. It must also put an end once and for all to settlements, blockades, the detention of Palestinians, the demolition of homes and evictions. This policy of genocide has been heightened in East Jerusalem, including through the revocation of identity cards for Palestinian residents, who have been forcibly removed.

As the Council knows very well, it is a crime under international law to force the relocation of thousands of Palestinians from their own city. In that context, it is scandalous, to say the least, that some are trying to ignore the legitimate right of Palestinians to defend themselves in the face of brutal aggression by

Israel — a regime that even possesses weapons of mass destruction.

It is important to reiterate that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela does not recognize Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem or its effort to have Jerusalem considered as a unified whole by declaring it eternal and indivisible.

Also of great concern are the letters from the Permanent Representatives of Lebanon and Syria to the Secretary-General in December 2009 and January of this year (S/2009/686 and S/2010/4 respectively) informing him of the ongoing violations committed by Israel on their respective territories. Syria has even condemned an Israeli plan to occupy additional Syrian territory in the Arab Golan and to Judaize its population.

It is right to ask why, in other conflict situations and even in those outside its purview, this body acts with such speed, and even disproportionately. Why is there this complicit silence, this inaction when Israel's failure to observe all norms of international law and the Charter of the United Nations is so obvious? We should ask the Council what importance it attaches to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the wall, or to the conclusions and recommendations of the Human Rights Council's Fact-Finding Mission on Israel's terrible and aggressive policies of extermination against an innocent people, or even to the Security Council's own report on Israel's responsibility in that horrendous situation.

Some of the victors of the Second World War sacrificed the Palestinian people without a second thought. Without consulting them, they decided that the Palestinians had to share their land with people of various nationalities who had only their religion in common. The United Nations owes an historic debt to the Palestinian people. As a Member State of the United Nations, we demand that the Security Council consider the implementation of Chapter II of the Charter of the United Nations.

Given the record — which has been thoroughly considered over the decades in meetings of this Council as well as of the General Assembly — of grave violations of international law in general, to the detriment of the Palestinian people and of the countries of the region, like Syria and Lebanon, we should ask whether, if the State of Israel is *motu propio* capable of complying with the obligations of the Charter of the United Nations, it is prepared to do so. We should also ask whether the Security Council has taken the necessary preventive or coercive steps to limit the privileges of the State of Israel as provided for under Article 5.

We ask the Security Council to look into the implementation of Chapter II of the Charter and to recommend to the General Assembly some of the actions provided for under it. This body's silence in the face of the Israeli Government's daily massacre of innocent Palestinians has cast doubt on its role as guarantor of international peace and security. We urge the Security Council to regain its legitimacy in dealing with the issue before us today, to carry out its functions and to adopt the decisions that, under the Charter of the United Nations, are necessary to definitively restore peace to the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Barout (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on the outstanding manner in which you have presided over the Security Council this month. I would also like to congratulate the five new non-permanent members of the Council. I wish them every success in their term of office.

The Secretariat's regular monthly briefings of the Council on developments in Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, have given us a full picture of the serious humanitarian and other violations of the rights of the Palestinian and other Arab populations of those territories by Israel, the occupying Power.

The Israeli Government has continued its policy of aggression and its blockade of the Gaza Strip, depriving Palestinians of their basic rights and of food, fuel, medicine and construction materials to rebuild after the destruction caused by the Israeli military machine in Gaza last year.

Israel has also continued to take a number of unilateral and illegal steps, including expanding the already illegal settlements in the West Bank and, in particular, East Jerusalem and its environs. The systematic policy of confiscating Palestinian territory and wealth, depopulating that land and replacing its inhabitants with Israeli settlers, along with the closure of Palestinian institutions and the provocative acts against Muslim and Christian Holy Sites in the Old

City, including attacks on Al-Aqsa Mosque, have produced bitterness and great rancour in the Arab and Islamic worlds.

The United Arab Emirates would like to warn that all those Israeli policies in East Jerusalem are very dangerous. They are intended to compel as many Palestinians as possible to leave the Holy City in order to make it easier for Israel to illegally Judaize it, change its political and demographic character and impose a de facto order that rides roughshod over international resolutions and over commitments made by Israel in peace agreements with the Palestinians.

How else can we interpret the stepped-up efforts to confiscate thousands of Palestinian identity cards in order to prevent Palestinians from living in the Holy City? Reports indicate that last year alone, Israel revoked the residency rights of about 14,000 Palestinians in the Holy City and confiscated the identity cards of 5,000 of them. That is the largest number of permit cancellations in East Jerusalem in a single year since the city was occupied in 1967.

As has recently been reported, Israel has used various pretexts for doing that. Tens of thousands of Palestinians face the same fate of losing their property and the right to reside in the city. That illustrates Israel's ongoing efforts to ethnically cleanse East Jerusalem of Palestinians and to illegally impose a de facto situation on the city.

The United Arab Emirates strongly deplores all unilateral illegal measures by Israel intended to prejudice final status negotiations. They do not serve the cause of peace and peaceful coexistence. We call on the Security Council and the Quartet to assume their responsibilities and take every necessary step to put an immediate end to those Israeli acts.

We call upon the international community to condemn Israel's unilateral measures in Palestinian territory and to require it to dismantle its separation wall and settlements.

We also call on the international community to force Israel to stop confiscating land and violating the Road Map, the provisions of international law, the Fourth Geneva Convention, all relevant resolutions of international legitimacy — including those of the tenth special session of the General Assembly — and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. We demand that Israel end its siege and its policy of starving the Palestinians, and allow international assistance to reach the affected Palestinian areas, especially the Gaza Strip.

In this context, while we note the compensation paid by Israel for deliberately destroying United Nations installations in the Strip, our delegation calls on Israel to provide the necessary financial compensation to the Palestinians in the Strip for its crimes and aggression against them, in accordance with the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48).

We have to provide international protection for the Palestinians against repeated Israeli aggressions. We call on Israel, the occupying Power, not to commit aggression against defenceless Palestinians, in accordance with its commitments and responsibilities under the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which apply to all occupied territories under Israel's authority. We call on the international community to double its financial and economic assistance to Palestinians in order to help them deal with this extremely serious humanitarian crisis.

As for sisterly Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates deplores the daily Israeli violations of Lebanese air space. We reaffirm our position that the occupying Power must withdraw from all Lebanese territory, including the Shab'a farms, Al-Ghajar village and the Kfar Shuba hills. The United Arab Emirates stands with our brothers in Syria, and we deem all measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, in the occupied Syrian Golan null and void and illegal. In this context, we call for the full withdrawal by Israel from the occupied Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In conclusion, we reaffirm that any delay by the international community in compelling Israel to end its illegal measures would send the wrong message to Israel and only encourage it to pursue them. That would push the area towards more conflict and violence, and obstruct regional and international efforts to establish a political climate conducive to peace negotiations and a comprehensive and just resolution to the Palestinian question through the two-State solution, which would allow the States to live in mutual respect, peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, allow me to begin by congratulating you on having assumed the presidency of the Council and to thank you for having convened this debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We are called once again to discuss the need for a peace process that would lead us to the realization of a Palestinian State living side by side with the State of Israel, and to bring an end to Israel's illegal military occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories.

I welcome the new members of the Council: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Gabon, Lebanon and Nigeria. We know that they will always act in defence of the principles of the Charter of our Organization. I would also like to thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

This year marks the sixty-second year of the looting of the Palestinian people of their homes, their ancestral lands and of their most fundamental and inalienable human rights. It is also the forty-third year of brutal military occupation by Israel, marked by death, physical and psychological aggression, blockades, ethnic cleansing, imprisonment and humiliation. It has also been a year since the brutal Israeli invasion and occupation of Gaza, the damage to which, exacerbated by the continued blockade, has been amply documented and will have harmful effects on the Palestinian population for decades. The international community demands that those responsible for this massacre be tried before impartial tribunals.

We cannot allow Israel to continue to play with human lives and with the rights of Palestinians, Syrians, Lebanese and those in neighbouring countries. How long are we going to meet in the Security Council, calling for open debates and consultations, adopting resolutions, and discussing an issue concerning which our Organization has already decided what must be done? The United Nations must meet its historic responsibility.

Or is it perhaps possible that some Member State still has doubts about the content of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which called for the creation of two States in Palestine, one Arab and one Jewish. Also clear and transparent are Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1701 (2006) on Lebanon and 497 (1981) on the Syrian Golan Heights. The fundamental problem does not lie in the content of these resolutions, but rather in the fact that Israel, the occupying Power, has not been required to comply with them. Those who are responsible for enforcing compliance are the permanent members of this Council, in particular one of them, the primary accomplice and ally of Israel.

The reality is that the issue of the Israeli occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories has not been resolved because Israel and its primary ally do not want to resolve it. From its beginnings, Israel has had its own clearly defined road map: the absorption of the entire Palestinian territory, the exile of that people along with the corresponding Judaization of the territory, and the expansion of its own State — all in full sight and with the consent of the members of this Council.

Illegal settlements throughout the Palestinian territory, walls that divide houses and neighbourhoods, ethnic cleansing that is being carried out, and the usurpation of East Jerusalem all point to a policy of absorption. The solution based on two States living together side by side is something that Israel has never contemplated.

As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, Nicaragua fully associates itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Egypt as Chairman of our Movement. We condemn Israel's illegal occupation of all of the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories, and we demand its immediate withdrawal. We condemn the Israeli policy and practice of building and/or not dismantling settlements, the inhuman blockade of Gaza and the bantustanization of the West Bank and other Palestinian territories.

It is high time for the international community to move from declarations and resolutions to action. Recognition by the entire international community of the Palestinian State would send a clear message that all the resolutions we have adopted must begin to be implemented. We do not understand why there some still who refuse to acknowledge that at this point. Thus far, only the Palestinian side has made commitments, whereby it has demonstrated its desire for peace. It is time now for the permanent members of the Council to demand that Israel make a commitment to peace and to a solution to this question in conformity with United Nations resolutions.

There is a manifest universal consensus in favour of speeding up the peace process; only Israel opposes

it. Thus, in order to get the job done, it is crucial that those who support Israel take appropriate action to ensure that Israel commits to the peace process. If Israel will not commit to an acceptable timetable, the Security Council must take appropriate measures as outlined in the Charter of the United Nations. The Palestinians, strengthening their unity with the support of the Arab nation, the Non-Aligned Movement and the rest of the international community, must prepare for their own declaration of independence, for their free and sovereign State, and for their admission as a full Member of this Organization.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Jomaa (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset, Sir, to express to you and the entire Chinese delegation our sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We have noted the excellent manner in which you have conducted the work of the Council, ensuring the success of its deliberations on a broad range of problems, notably the tragic impact of the earthquake in Haiti and the resulting enormous destruction and loss of life. Among the dead or injured were members of the staff of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, who were carrying out their duties in defence of the principles and ideals of the Organization, and including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of mission, the late Hédi Annabi of Tunisia. May God have mercy on their souls.

I also wish to congratulate the five new non-permanent members of the Security Council. We thank the Assistant Secretary-General for his excellent briefing this morning.

Today we are discussing once more the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, in the context of the deadlock to which the peace process has regressed since the negotiations stopped, and amid all the events that have increased tensions and escalated the situation in the region, despite the efforts of many international parties to reconvene the peace negotiations.

The excesses of Israel and its practices in the occupied Palestinian territory have further complicated the situation and placed obstacles in the way of the revival of the peace process. The continued settlement activity, the demolition of houses, the evictions of Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the excavations around the Al-Aqsa mosque and other holy places in the city, and the plans to change its geographic and demographic character: all of these constitute grave violations of international instruments and resolutions of international legitimacy, in particular General Assembly resolutions on Jerusalem, as well as exacerbating tension throughout the region.

The continued blockade unjustly imposed on the Gaza Strip and the policies of closures in Palestinian areas and of restricting Palestinians' movements have contributed greatly to increased tensions in the region. This is despite repeated calls from the international community, notably from the Secretary-General in numerous reports and through his efforts to urge the Israeli authorities to lift the blockade and enable the international bodies and organizations working in this area to make progress in their reconstruction efforts and in providing for the basic needs of the civilian population in Gaza.

Tunisia has been consistently committed to the principles of justice and peace; it is eager to achieve a solution to the problem and alleviate the suffering of the brotherly people of Palestine and favours the path of peace. It therefore calls on international actors, especially the Quartet, to step up their efforts to pressure Israel to put an end to its provocative actions and seriously engage in the peace process. This means, essentially, halting settlement activities, lifting the blockade on Gaza and all the restrictions on other Palestinian territories and immediately ending all activities that can alter Jerusalem's character or deprive the Palestinian people of their rights.

In that context, Tunisia believes that the current deadlock and the return of tensions to the region, as a result of the total lack of progress in reconvening negotiations, pose a grave threat to the situation in a region that simply cannot take any more tension or escalation. We therefore call on the international community to redouble its efforts to surmount the obstacles blocking the way to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. Such a peace can be achieved only through negotiations, and that requires trust and a commitment by all parties concerned to existing agreements and to the terms of reference of the peace process.

In regard to the sister republics of Lebanon and Syria, I reiterate our call for Israel's withdrawal from

Syrian and Lebanese occupied territories, based on the option of a comprehensive settlement of all aspects of the Middle East crisis, in a way that will strengthen peace and stability for all the peoples of the region.

Tunisia, under the leadership of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, puts the Palestinian question at the top of its priorities and concerns. This steadfast, principled attitude affirms my country's position vis-à-vis the Palestinian people in their just struggle to regain their national rights and establish an independent State on their own land. We reiterate our support for all efforts that seek a just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in a manner that can guarantee the return of the occupied Arab territories, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the terms of reference of the peace process, including the Arab Peace Initiative.

Tunisia therefore reiterates its commitment, as a peace-loving country that respects international law and believes in humanity's values and ideals, to pursuing all efforts to put an end to this long-standing crisis and to the suffering of a people deprived for decades of the exercise of their basic rights. We hope to achieve concrete measures that can realize the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to attain freedom and sovereignty on their national soil, to regain all occupied Arab territories and to achieve peace for all peoples of the region. That alone will eliminate all tensions and initiate a new era of stability and peace.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): I congratulate you warmly, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I also take this opportunity to extend my delegation's sincere congratulations to the new members of the Council — Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Gabon, Lebanon and Nigeria — and to wish them every success in upholding their responsibility to fulfil their duties over the next two years. Likewise, my warm appreciation goes to the outgoing members of the Council: Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Croatia, Libya and Viet Nam.

One year ago, Gaza faced an all-out attack, the so-called Operation Cast Lead. During that barbaric operation, the Israeli regime killed or maimed thousands of besieged innocent Palestinians, including women and children, and wilfully and systematically targeted civilian infrastructure and facilities. Even the United Nations was not spared the Israeli atrocities, as the compound of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was deliberately shelled by the Israeli army. There is no doubt that the Israeli acts in Gaza amounted to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Almost one year has passed since then but, despite all efforts on the part of the United Nations, there is still no prospect of justice for the victims. The Israeli regime continues to defy the will of the international community and persists in the Palestinian blockade, causing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

These violations of international norms and principles are not limited only to Gaza. The persistent assault against the Islamic and Christian holy places in Jerusalem, the continued construction of the separation wall, the excavation work in and around the holy mosque, the revocation of Palestinian residency rights in the city, the forced eviction of Palestinian families from the city and the imposition of severe restrictions on movement are but some of the illegal acts carried out by the Israeli regime in the West Bank. Despite strong international condemnation, illegal settlements are being expanded much faster than in the past, and more and more Palestinian houses are being demolished. The illegal decision to build new housing units is a move undoubtedly geared at altering the demographic composition and architectural, cultural and religious character of the Palestinian territories, particularly in Jerusalem and its surrounding areas.

On 5 November 2009, the General Assembly adopted its resolution 64/10 on the follow-up to the report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict. That resolution constitutes an important step forward in remedying the violations of the Israeli regime in Gaza, so vividly authenticated in the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48). We expect the necessary action to be taken by the relevant bodies of the United Nations, including the Security Council, in order to put an end to the culture of impunity for Israeli war crimes and crimes against humanity. If criminals were brought to justice, room for criminal acts by those who possess the motives and the madness to commit them would be restricted. Impunity for perpetrators of

crimes of a grave nature is, in itself, a cause of and an incentive for further atrocities.

Unfortunately, it seems that, for certain members of this Council, the lives of the Palestinians and their long suffering under the occupation and suppression do not count, as the massacre of hundreds of Palestinians, including dozens of women and children, is not worthy of the least consideration, let alone meaningful firm action. That is true with regard to the illegal detention of more than 11,000 Palestinians, including hundreds of women and children. Certain members of the Council are used to giving long speeches on human rights, and yet their true stance was revealed by the result of the voting in the General Assembly on resolution 64/10 on the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Israel in Gaza. That is a clear example of double standards, which is detrimental to the cause of justice and human rights.

We hope that in the next few months, when United Nations bodies endeavour to follow up on the Goldstone report on the atrocities committed by the Israeli regime in Gaza, we will see them revisit their unwavering and unconditional support for the Israeli regime.

The Israeli regime has persisted in its aggressive and expansionist policies towards Lebanon by constantly violating its land, sea and airspace and by refusing to withdraw from Lebanese occupied land in Shab'a, the Kafr Shuba hills and the northern part of Ghajar village. It also continues its occupation of the occupied Syrian Golan. That regime should immediately and fully withdraw from those occupied territories, in compliance with the most basic principles of international law and the United Nations Charter.

The question of Palestine is the most urgent issue that the international community continues to face, and it needs swift and comprehensive attention. Undoubtedly, attaining a peaceful and just settlement of the question of Palestine is imperative for the realization of comprehensive and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East and beyond. Occupation, aggression, State terrorism, expulsion, intimidation, the setting up of new settlements, the construction of the separation wall and attempts to change the demographic and cultural identity of the occupied land will not bring peace in the Middle East. Those are undoubtedly most serious and gross violations of United Nations resolutions, especially Security Council resolutions, and must therefore be dealt with urgently and appropriately by the Council and other United Nations bodies in a resolute and decisive manner.

In conclusion, in our view, a lasting peace in Palestine and the region will be possible through justice and by ending discrimination and the occupation of Palestine and other occupied territories. Today, which coincides with the first anniversary of the tragic events in Gaza, we need to act collectively to demonstrate our unqualified support for the cause of Palestine and to rally to the assistance of those who have been deprived of their rights. Lifting the blockade, starting the reconstruction of Gaza and putting an end to the illegal acts in the West Bank are among the most urgent Palestinian issues. We have a common duty and responsibility to offer multifaceted support to the Palestinians, whether in Gaza or in the West Bank. Let us hope that oppression and occupation will end and that justice and freedom will prevail in the Palestinian occupied territories.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations.

Mr. Mahmassani (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having allowed us to participate in today's Security Council debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, given the serious deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. I also thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his invaluable briefing.

There has been dangerous and unprecedented settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories. At the end of 2009, there were more than 500,000 settlers, and that number is increasing. The Israeli occupation of the occupied Palestinian territories, the invasion of Palestinian territory by Jewish settlers and their entrenchment within that territory run counter to putting an end to the Israeli occupation and to the establishment of an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israeli policies and practices seek to alter the physical nature and demographic composition of the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. This represents a flagrant violation of international law and endangers the situation in the region.

We are deeply concerned about Israeli policies and actions in East Jerusalem. There were no Jews there in 1967, when Israel occupied the area, but as of the end of 2009 there were 190,000 Israeli settlers in 12 settlements, and Israel had confiscated 30 per cent of the land in East Jerusalem for building settlements.

As stated by Israel, 250,000 Palestinians make up only 35 per cent of Jerusalem's population while 650,000 Israelis make up 65 per cent. Despite this, documents of the Jerusalem municipal authorities indicate that plans to double the number of Jewish inhabitants continue. In this demographic attack Israel is using population policy to ensure its control over East Jerusalem.

East Jerusalem is an integral part of the occupied Palestinian territories. Since the beginning of the occupation, in 1967, dozens of resolutions have been adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly, all of which refer to the illegality of the annexation of East Jerusalem. Israel continues with impunity to destroy the houses of Arab inhabitants, revoke their residence permits and expropriate their property in order to Judaize the city and expel its Arab inhabitants and establish more Jewish settlements in and around East Jerusalem, in flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, international humanitarian law and Security Council resolutions.

Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa mosque are in grave danger. The international community must not remain silent in the face of Israel's practices which violate the city's heritage, its attempts at manipulation and Judaization, and its violation of Christian and Muslim holy places. The excavations and archaeological work under and around the Al-Aqsa mosque and in the Silwan area could damage invaluable cultural and religious heritage and the Al-Aqsa mosque itself, as well as other sites. This could have very serious repercussions in the Arab and Muslim world and could result in endless conflict.

We call on the Council to shoulder its responsibility and use means at its disposal to compel Israel to respect international law and United Nations resolutions, end its illegal plans to Judaize Jerusalem and abide by the Fourth Geneva Convention in Jerusalem and throughout the occupied Palestinian territories.

We are concerned by the serious humanitarian crisis affecting the Palestinian people in Gaza as a result of Israel's aggression and siege against the Gaza Strip. Israel is preventing the flow of humanitarian assistance to the inhabitants and hindering the delivery of fuel and building materials for Gaza's reconstruction. Ensuring stability and a return to normalcy requires the international community to make Israel open the border crossings immediately and permanently and permit access for all essential goods, including medicines, food, fuel and commercial goods, in order to prevent an increase in poverty in the Gaza Strip.

Israel's occupation of the Arab territories is at the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For the sake of establishing peace and security, the countries of the region call for an end to Israel's culture of occupation in the Arab territories and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, in conformity with international resolutions, international law, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. This must be achieved through negotiations with a clear mandate that would begin with an immediate halt to settlement activity, including natural growth, in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and fruitful negotiations leading to a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question and the Israeli-Arab conflict.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Keegel (Sri Lanka): Permit me at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We also extend our felicitations to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Gabon, Lebanon and Nigeria on their election to the Council. We thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his briefing. My delegation appreciates the opportunity given to us to once again to focus on the situation in the Middle East, particularly the Palestinian question.

Sri Lanka has consistently supported a peaceful settlement to the Palestinian issue and has called on all sides to fully implement the resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly on the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and on the realization of the two-State solution. Our hope is that the day will soon come when Israel, Palestine and their neighbours can coexist in peace and harmony.

We remain deeply concerned about the daily widespread suffering and hardships the Palestinian

people continue to endure due to the economic blockade and the ensuing grave situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. While we note the relaxation of some restrictions by the Israeli Government and the intention to suspend new settlement construction, we call for the removal of all restrictions. The Palestinian people have suffered for too long and continue to live under occupation.

The denial of their fundamental right to statehood due to continued Israeli occupation has seriously affected the socio-economic well-being of the population in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In this context, my delegation believes that for peace to be viable and sustainable in the Palestinian territory, Israel must withdraw from all of the Palestinian territories back to the 1967 borders. It must end the economic blockade. The illegal expansion of settlements, construction of the separation wall and changes to the demographic character of the Palestinian territory will only increase tension and animosity throughout the Middle East region.

The Palestinian Authority needs to continue the implementation of its security plan and make every effort at its disposal to improve law and order and to ensure that its territory is not used for illegal attacks on Israeli civilians. Both sides must do everything possible to ensure the safety and security of civilians.

Sri Lanka reiterates its support for the Palestinian National Authority under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas. We stress the need to preserve and protect the national and democratic institutions which are vital for a future independent Palestinian State. We therefore urge the Palestinian groups to act speedily to reconcile and reunite within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian National Authority. Unity among the Palestinian people is their strength.

My delegation supports international efforts for the early resumption of negotiations and believes that unity of the Palestinian people is essential to ensure proper conditions for the resumption of dialogue by Israel and Palestine at an early stage. We also urge both sides to ensure a climate conducive to the resumption of negotiations. We also hope that the Egyptian and regional initiatives will be supported by all groups in Palestine to enable elections to be held early.

In conclusion, Sri Lanka reiterates its support for a lasting peace in the Middle East, including the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.30 p.m.